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AFGHANISTAN

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FIRST PERSON

From Learner to Leader

Hundreds of Afghan men and women receive American-style education



USAID/AUAF

“What I have seen and learned here has given me courage. Now I want to open my own computer business in Kabul.”

— Mariam Jawad, student at the USAID funded American University of Afghanistan

When Mariam Jawad arrived at the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) in the fall semester of 2010, she entered a library for the first time in her life. She also used a computer for the first time and eventually sent her first email. For a 19-year-old woman who speaks three languages and dreams of becoming a businesswoman, this is surprising.

Mariam’s adult life was launched the moment she set foot on the AUAF campus. She now controls her future, one in which she will be at the forefront of a growing wave of female professional who are destined to change life in Afghanistan.

“I didn’t know what to do my first day at the university. Everything was so new and it was my first time away from my family,” said Mariam. Here immediate family is still in Logar Province, where sending a girl to school is a life threatening proposition. Mariam knows because she has witnessed the assaults. Members of her immediate family have been confronted and attacked. Now they stay at home. The idea of a young woman attending classes and playing sports would have been met with certain death.

It was AUAF’s reputation that initially attracted her, and after a prospective visit to campus, she concluded it was different than any other university and wanted to attend.

After her classes began in AUAF’s Foundation Studies program for high school graduates, Mariam found the pace of campus life, the exchanges between students and teachers, and the community both exciting and inspiring. Her confidence began to reflect these new experiences. “What I saw gave me courage. Now I can talk with anybody – men, foreigners, professors – it’s not a problem.” She watched the interaction between students and faculty and discovered her teachers wanted to know what everyone thought, including the women.

After graduation, Mariam wants to open her own computer business in Kabul. In the meantime, she’s perfecting her English through the Foundation Studies program, playing basketball, participating in student clubs, and preparing to enter AUAF’s undergraduate program. Mariam’s transformation has just begun.